

What is claimed is:

1. An inventory agent for use in a target device accessible to a data network, the inventory agent comprising:  
a receiver for receiving an inventory-commence message from a client computer through the data network;  
a detector for detecting inventory associated with the target device; and  
a transmitter for transmitting to a host unit through the data network an inventory-data message including inventory data associated with the target device.
2. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 1 wherein the receiver compares the identity of the inventory-commence message with the identity of the inventory agent.
3. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 2 wherein the inventory agent terminates the inventory request if the identity of the inventory-commence message is not associated with the identity of the inventory agent.
4. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 1 wherein the inventory agent is unaccessible to the data network at time of transmission of the inventory-commence message and wherein the inventory agent receives the inventory-commence message upon re-access to the data network.
5. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 1 wherein the inventory-commence message, inventory detection, and inventory-data message require no involvement by a user of the target device.

6. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 1 wherein the inventory agent is remotely installed on the target device through the data network.

7. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 1 wherein the inventory agent saves compiled inventory data directly to a file in executable language statements for incorporation into a database.

8. An inventory agent as claimed in claim 7 wherein the executable language statements include Structure Query Language (SQL) statements.

9. A host unit, for use in a host computer, for use in a component audit and inventory management system accessible to a data network, the host computer comprising a computer processor, memory, and user interface, the host unit comprising:  
a transmitter for transmitting, via the data network, an inventory-commence message to a client computer, the inventory-commence message for activating an inventory agent installed on a target device; and  
a receiver for receiving, via the data network, an inventory-data message from the inventory agent, the inventory-data message including inventory data associated with the target device.

10. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein the inventory data contained within the inventory-data message is stored within a database.

11. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein the host unit is programmed to establish an account with the client computer, the account being characterized as a group of data relating to inventory assets.

12. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein first and second inventory data are deliverable by the host unit to the client computer, the first inventory data comprising inventory data not identified with a particular target device.

13. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein the host unit is programmed to calculate the age of the target device.

14. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein the host unit is programmed to predict replacement and disposal rates for specified target devices.

15. A host unit as claimed in claim 9 wherein the host unit is programmed to analyze the migration from one target device system to another target device system and wherein the analysis is remotely accessible by the client computer via the data network.

16. A computer program product comprising a memory having computer-readable code embodied therein for detecting and compiling inventory data associated with a target device comprising:  
code for receiving an inventory-commence message from a client computer through a data network;  
code for detecting inventory associated with the target device; and  
code for transmitting to a host unit through the data network an inventory-data message including inventory data associated with the target device.

17. A system for remote component audit and inventory management for operation in a data network comprising:  
a host unit for use in a host computer, the host computer comprising a processor, memory, and user interface;

a client computer for requesting inventory information;  
a target device characterized as a source of inventory data; and  
an inventory agent for installation on the target device and for receiving an inventory-commence message via the data network from the client computer and for detecting inventory data associated with the target device and for sending an inventory-data message including the inventory data via the data network to the host unit.

18. A system for remote component audit and inventory management as claimed in Claim 17 wherein the host unit, client computer, and target device at least intermittently access at least one message handling system operable within the data network wherein the at least one message handling system is used to transmit the inventory-commence message and inventory-data message.
19. A system for remote component audit and inventory management as claimed in Claim 17 wherein the at least one message handling system includes an electronic mail system.
20. A system for remote component audit and inventory management as claimed in Claim 17 wherein the inventory-commence message, inventory detection, and inventory-data message are undetectable by a user of the target device.
21. A system for remote component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 17 wherein the inventory agent saves compiled inventory data associated with the target device to a file in executable language statements for incorporation into a database associated with the host unit.

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22. A system for remote component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 17 wherein first and second inventory data are deliverable by the host unit to the client computer, the first inventory data comprising inventory data not identified with a particular target device.

23. A method for component audit and inventory management for operation in a data network comprising the steps of:  
sending, by a client computer to a target device via the data network, an inventory-commence message capable of activating an inventory agent installed within the target device;  
detecting, by the inventory agent, inventory data associated with the target device;  
and  
delivering, by the inventory agent to a host unit via the data network, an inventory-data message including the inventory data associated with the target device.

24. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein the inventory-commence message detects the absence of an installed inventory agent on the target device and, where no inventory agent is installed, instructs the host unit to install an inventory agent on the target device.

25. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein the client computer sends, via the data network, a request to the host unit for inventory data pertaining to a target device and wherein the host unit, in response to the request, generates and sends an inventory-commence message to the client computer via the data network for distribution to a target device.

26. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein the inventory-commence message includes a pulse number for identifying inventory data with a particular date and time associated with the generation of the pulse number.

27. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein the target device is only intermittently accessible to the data network.

28. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein first and second inventory data are deliverable by the host unit to the client computer, the first inventory data comprising inventory data not identified with a particular target device.

29. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 28 wherein no fee is chargeable for providing the first inventory data.

30. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein the host unit is programmable to analyze the inventory data to provide information associated with characteristics of specified target devices and wherein the analyzed inventory data is remotely accessible by a client computer.

31. A method for component audit and inventory management as claimed in claim 23 wherein an Internet portal is accessible by the client computer via the host unit.

32. A method for component audit and inventory management for operation in a target device accessible to a data network comprising the steps of: receiving an inventory-commence message from a client computer through the data network;

detecting inventory associated with the target device; and  
transmitting to a host unit through the data network an inventory-data message  
including inventory data associated with the target device.

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